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An

Inaugural Dissertation

On

Phlegmatia Dolens.

By

Nicholas L Thomas Va.

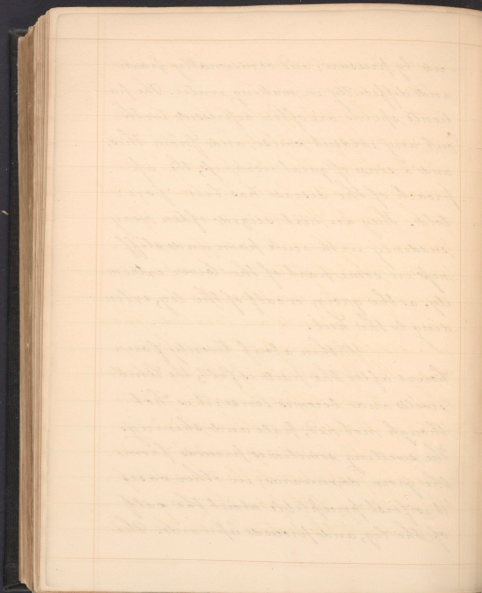
Phlegmatia Dolens

This disease, more usually denominated swelled leg or milk leg, is almost exclusively confined to puerperal women. Examples of it however have occurred where that state did not exist, and I am informed by my preceptor Dr. Charles Warter, that he met with a case in a male subject.

It generally makes its appearance about a fortnight after delivery; sometimes sooner; sometimes later. The swelling is preceded by tenderness and transient pains in the pelvis, increas-

-ced by pressure; and occasionally pain and difficulty in making water. The patient's spirits are often depressed without any evident cause, and from this, and a sense of great weakness, the approach of the disease has been foretold. They are next seized often very suddenly with acute pain and stiffness in some part of the lower extremity, as the groin or calf of the leg, extending to the heel.

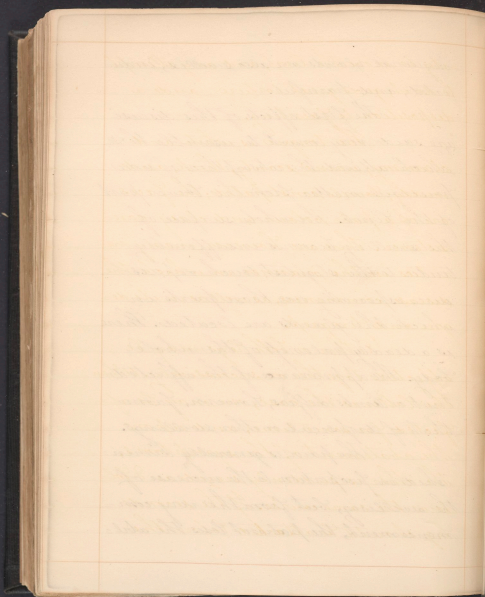
Within about twenty four hours after the pain is felt, the limb swells and becomes tense: it is hot though not red, pale and shining. The swelling sometimes proceeds from the groin downwards; in other cases it is first perceptible about the calf of the leg, and proceeds upwards. The



inguinal glands are also swelled, indurated, and painful.

The first effects of this disease are, said very much to resemble those which attend the absorption of some poisonous matter from the lower part of the limb. The whole surface of the swelling becomes insufferably tender to the slightest touch or pressure, especially over those parts in which the glands are located. There is a deadly paleness of the whole body. The appearance of the affected limb or limbs differs, however, from that of dropsical or other swellings.

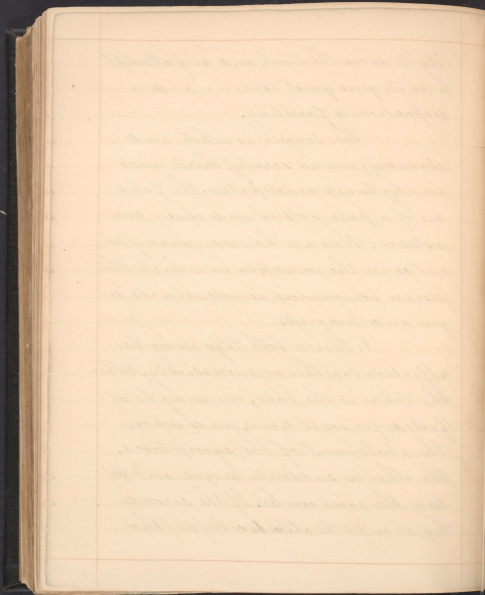
The pain is generally diminished in proportion to the increase of the swelling, but from the very commencement, the patient loses the abil-



city to move the limb, and any attempt to do it, gives great torture and a disposition to fainting.

The tongue is white and clammy; urine scanty, thick, and muddy; bowels constipated; the faces are of a pale colour and clay consistence. There are however many varieties in the manner in which the disease commences, as well as in its degree and progress.

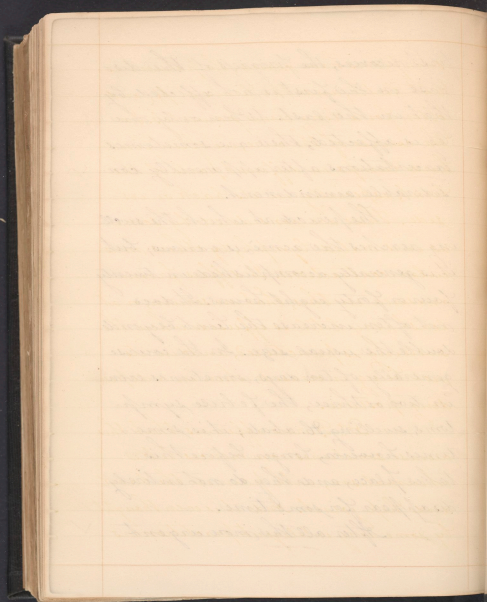
Either or both legs may be affected together or successively. When the latter is the case, one may be affected for some time, and upon the abatement of the symptoms, the other is suddenly seized and follows the same course. If the second leg should be affected before the



first recovers, the progress of the disease in the first is not affected by that in the last. When only one leg is affected, there are sometimes exacerbations after apparently considerable amendment.

The period at which the swelling reaches the acmé, is various; but it is generally accomplished in twenty four or forty eight hours. It does not often increase the limb beyond double the usual size. In the course generally of ten days, sometimes even in two or three, the febrile symptoms, swelling &c. abate; it is sometimes however, longer before this takes place, and they do not entirely disappear for some time.

After all the more urgent



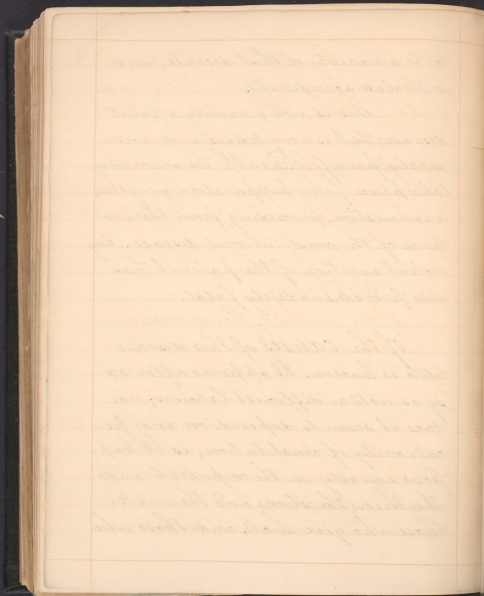
symptoms have ceased, the patient is left feeble, and the limbs stiff, and often for a long time powerless. In the course of the cure, we often find hard lumps in different parts of the limb, especially in its back or inside. These are considered by some as indurated lymph, by others muscular contractions. It differs from anasarca in this, that no serum, or at least very little is effused when the swelling is punctured, and in its not being increased when in a depending posture. ✓

Dr. Burns affirms that this disease sometimes commences like rheumatism, with pain in the back and hip joint. And it is even thought by some very intelligent practitioners ✓

to be a variety of that disease, and is treated accordingly.

This is not generally a fatal disease, but is very tedious and excessively painful. Death however may take place from suppuration, gangrene, or exhaustion, proceeding from the violence of the constitutional disease. Any violent exertion of the patient has also proved suddenly fatal.

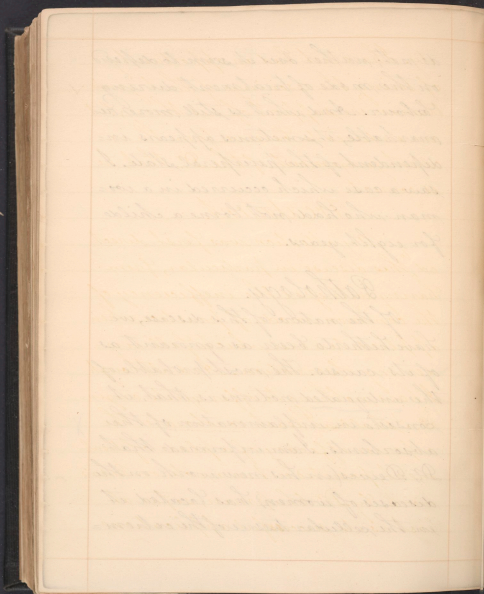
Of the causes of this disease little is known. It appears after easy as well as difficult labours; nor does it seem to depend on any peculiarity of constitution, as it happens equally in the corpulent and the thin; the strong and the weak; those who give suck; and those who



do not; neither does it seem to depend on the mode of treatment during labour. And what is still more remarkable, it sometimes appears independent of the puerperal state. I saw a case which occurred in a woman who had not borne a child for eight years.

Pathology.

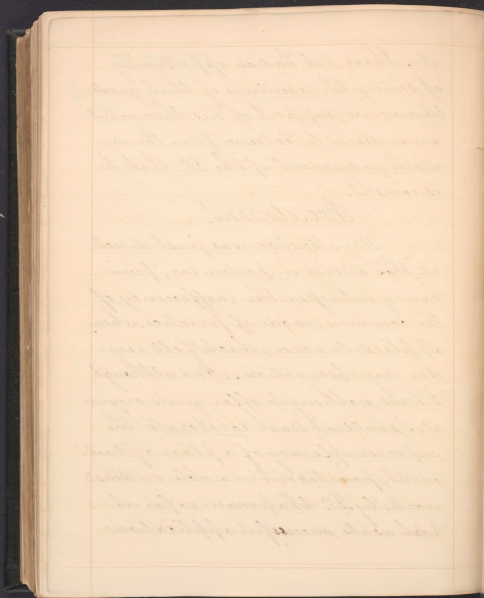
Of the nature of this disease, we have hitherto been as ignorant as of its causes. The most probable of the antiquated notions is, that it consists in inflammation of the absorbents. I am informed that Dr. Dewees (in his new work on the diseases of women) has located it in the cellular tissue of the extrem-



ity. I have not had an opportunity
of seeing the reasonings of that gentle-
man in support of his theory; but
am induced to believe from the ex-
cellent judgement of the Dr. that, he
is correct.

Treatment.

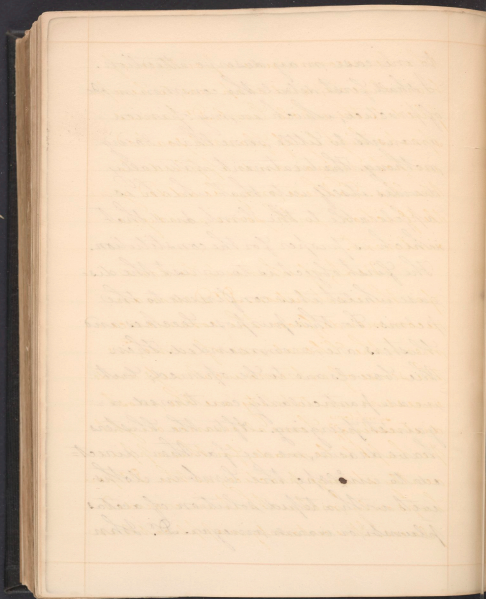
My attention was first directed
to this disease in particular, from
having witnessed the inefficiency of
the common mode of practice, when
applied to a case which fell un-
der my observation. And although
I have nothing to offer quite origi-
nal, I shall at least corroborate the
superior efficacy of a plan of treat-
ment, pointed out in a note on Burns's
work, by Dr. Chapman; so far at
least as its successful applications



to one case may deserve attention.

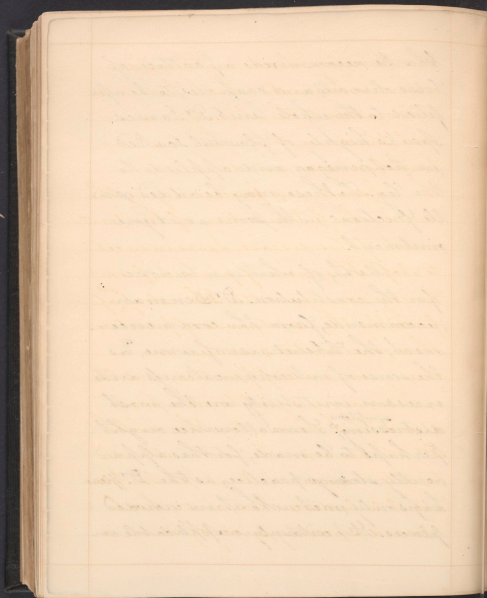
I shall first detail the common mode of practice, which in my opinion amounts to little more than doing nothing. The treatment naturally divides itself into that which is applicable to the limb, and that which is proper for the constitution.

The first object is to arrest the disease whilst it is confined to the pelvis. For this purpose leeches and blisters are recommended. Then the bowels are to be opened; but we are particularly cautioned against purging. After the blisters have drawn, we are farther directed to envelope the limb in cloths wet with a tepid solution of acetos plumbi, or warm vinegar. Dr. John



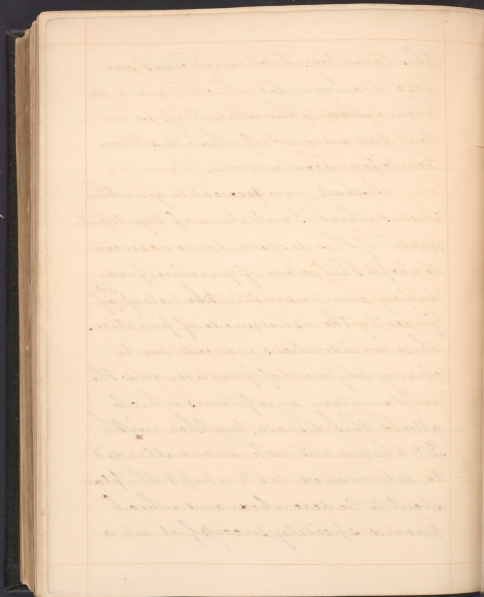
Clarke recommends a poultice of
Iran, olive oil and soap lees, to be ap-
plied to the whole Limb. Dr. James
speaks highly of flannel soaked
in hot vinegar and applied to
the Leg. To these may be added gen-
tle frictions with some anodyne
ointment.

Next, of what is to be done
for the constitution. Dr. Denman
recommends, from the commence-
ment, the liberal use of wine, as
the sense of extreme weakness and
excessive irritability are the most
distressing ^{symptoms}. Some allowance ought
perhaps to be made, for this appa-
rently strange practice, as the Dr. per-
haps only met with it in crowded
places. It is certainly inapplicable in



this Country. Such medicines are also recommended which have a determination to the skin. This is about the amount of what has been heretofore recommended.

I shall now proceed to give the views which I entertain of the treatment of this disease. I was induced to adopt this mode of practice, from having seen how little ~~the~~ ^{was} relief afforded by the usual mode of practice. These considerations induced me to change my mode of practice, and the inflammatory symptoms which attend this disease, together with Dr. Chapman's note above alluded to, determined me to adopt the plan about to be described, and which proved speedily successful in a



case which occurred to me last summer.

I shall first speak of the remedies adapted to the constitution. That this is an inflammatory disease, no one can doubt who shall observe the attendant symptoms. This being granted, venesection the most effectual remedy in all inflammatory diseases, should never be neglected in this. The extent to which this remedy should be carried, must be determined by the pulse.

The next in importance ~~to~~ is purging. Notwithstanding Mr. Burns caution to the contrary, it will be found, according to my limited experience a very impor-

-tant remedy.

Opium at night, after the more inflammatory symptoms have been reduced by the preceding measures, will be found indispensable to procure sleep and calm the irritability of the system. I have found the Dover's powder to answer extremely well.

Now, of the remedies proper for the limb. We shall find that the application of twenty or thirty leeches to the groin will aid much in arresting the progress of the disease.

Blisters were used in the first case I witnessed, but with no advantage.

Some of the anodyne linaments for the purpose of keeping the limb in a moist condition, may be rubbed on with advantage.

This concludes what I have to say
of the treatment of this disease. Sim-
ple as it may appear, I believe with
much confidence, that, if it were
generally pursued, it would very
much curtail the sufferings of
humanity, and the disease would
soon cease to be the terror of puer-
peral women.

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